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ABSTRACT

Views of students and teachers on misrepresentation, one aspect of academic dishonesty, were studied. Misrepresentation is defined as "retyping another person's paper and submitting it as your own." Three library instructors and 22 undergraduate students at Iowa State University were interviewed for their views on why students turn in the same assignment. Before the interviews, students wrote down reasons they would/would not turn in the same assignment. While all of the teachers said they would have the students redo the assignment, the way they would proceed was based on the circumstances and the student's response. The consensus among instructors was that most of the students who commit misrepresentation are not aware of the principles of independent scholarship and academic integrity. Sixty-one percent of the students would not turn in the same assignment; however, about 35% were motivated by fear of punishment, or they placed conditions on their reasoning that indicated a sketchy comprehension of misrepresentation and academic dishonesty. While 39% of the students may be close to understanding academic integrity, they were motivated by their own immediate needs. One percent of the students did not indicate any conflict with misrepresentation. Students' answers are considered in light of Kohlberg's model of moral development. (SW)

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"BUT WE DID IT TOGETHER;" OR, ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND MISREPRESENTATION AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

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"But We Did it Together;" or, Academic Integrity and Misrepresentation Among College Students *

Higher learning values the creation and communication of ideas. And inherent in this value is the respect for properly documenting, representing, and expressing the intellectual content of an idea. But how do students learn this value? Academic integrity, that adherence to doing one's own thinking, own writing, own creating, is often left to develop by itself in the student. Instructors embrace the responsibility for imparting the subject content of an area of knowledge without hesitation. But the ideas of independent scholarship and the respect for critically thinking and then effectively communicating that thought, are seldom taught in a direct manner.

What is at issue is students lack a basic reference point for ethical academic behavior. Too often our educational goal of learning and its evaluation, grading, are confused as being one instead of the two distinct processes that learning and grading are. So that for students, getting the grade becomes the goal. With the focus off of learning, it may seem to some students that any behavior may be appropriate in order to receive good grades.

Lacking clear instructions, and then compound that with confusion regarding the goal of education, it is no wonder that students are either wholly ignorant of, or uncertain to, as what constitutes academic dishonesty. And it is this uncertainty which undergirds some of the unethical academic behavior occurring on our campuses (Uhlig and Howes, 1967; Barnett and Dalton 1981).

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Hawley (1984) found that plagiarism, recycling papers, and most unacceptable documentation, are the result of ignorance rather than deceit. Other studies treat cheating behavior comprehensively, and find a diversity of meanings in existence for cheating and ambiguity surrounding what is right or wrong in the academic setting (Nuss 1984; Barnett and Dalton 1981). For higher education, academic dishonesty is a dangerous and self-defeating situation. Without academic integrity, higher learning cannot thrive.

"One cannot follow moral principles if one does not understand (or believe in) moral principles" (Kohlberg 1975, 49). This is the dilemma instructors face regarding the principles and actions of our students. Some students may have a sketchy understanding of academic integrity. Other students defy the code of ethical behavior in an academic setting knowingly. And still others have a clear understanding and personal adherence to independent scholarship. Whatever the case, too rarely, do our students have a sense of what academic integrity is from their teachers. We assume our students have a firm comprehension of independent scholarship, so we rarely make a point of teaching that concept.

In support of the need to teach the concept academic integrity, moral development theory and its application to understanding moral behavior has added a new dimension to the study of academic dishonesty. John P. Houston, intrigued by Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development, postulated that moral instruction using Kohlberg's method of group discussions of moral dilemmas would heighten moral judgement and thus reduce academic dishonesty. His work suggests that moral judgement and moral behavior can be taught, and that instruction makes a significant impact on moral action (Houston 1983).

The purpose of this paper is to illustrate from a limited sample, how undergraduates view misrepresentation, one aspect of academic dishonesty. Rather than provide a student with choices on a questionnaire, the interview process was chosen. By recording the student's own words, it was hoped that this would shed light on the logic followed when misrepresenting one's work. The interview was to elicit the student's attitudes and feelings. From the students' answers, a stage from Kohlberg's six stage model of moral development is assigned. As well as student perceptions, faculty perceptions concerning why students cheat and the responsibility of the instructor in fostering academic integrity will be addressed. For the purposes of this paper, the definition for misrepresentation comes from the Iowa State University Handbook (1985): "Misrepresentation. You misrepresent your work by... retyping another person's paper and submitting it as your own... " (p.42).

The study will be limited by sample size (25) and to the perceptions of Iowa State University undergraduates enrolled in Library Instruction 160. This sample may not be representative of the entire Iowa State University undergraduate student body or representative of undergraduates at other institutions of higher education. Also, this study will be limited to Library Instruction faculty members who may not be representative of all faculty members. Emphasis of the study is on the interview and the reasoning process of the individual.

The Problem

Library Instruction 160 is a basic library skills course required for graduation for all undergraduates at Iowa State University. It is a half-credit, half-semester course to be taken in the freshmen

year or junior transfer year. Approximately 3,000 students are enrolled in this course each semester. Four instructors are responsible for teaching 60 sections. Grading is "Satisfactory" or "Fail." Course requirements are earning 50 or more points on a 64 point objective test and earning a "Satisfactory" (S) on "The Indexing Services Assignment." The assignment is a nine step-by step exercise which reinforces the learning objective of a periodical literature search strategy.

Duplicate papers for this assignment are received by instructors. The Library Instruction Department as a whole does not place control on identifying duplicate papers. Exact copies are noticed while grading, and only in individual instructors' sections. No procedure exists to check for duplicate papers coursewide. Therefore, the incidence of exact assignments may be higher than individual instructors presently are aware.

Method

Three library instructors and twenty-two students were interviewed for their views on why students turn in the same assignment (see Appendix for sample questions). The students were volunteers who agreed to answer a short hypothetical situation. The nature of the situation and its intent was not revealed in the class announcement for volunteers. Five students from three sections, and ten students from one section voluntered for the project. After writing their responses, students were interviewed to elucidate why they believed their answer was correct, how they arrived at their reason, what they would do as a teacher faced with exact assignments, and if they would have answered differently at some other time in their lives.

Results: The Faculty Response

Two of the three instructors stated that in a half-semester (seven or eight sections for a total of 350-400 students) she may receive two or three sets of duplicate papers. The third instructor receives zero to one set in a half-semester.

Instructor One attributes the occurrence of misrepresentation on "The Indexing Services Assignment" to the ease of the transgression. Probably unplanned but easy to do, students just work together, and without considering the consequences, turn in the same work. As another explanation, she posits that a student may not understand the assignment and is too shy to ask for help. This type of student unfortunately joins another equally confused student. They both work together and innocently turn in the same incorrect work.

In handling misrepresentation, Instructor One writes on the assignment "Exact copy of ... Redo assignment." Students found this legitimate and readily did another assignment. There was no consultation with the students. Presently, Instructor One calls the students in to discuss misrepresentation. She attributes this change to witnessing how another instructor in the department handles the infraction of misrepresentation.

Instructor Two faces two or three sets of duplicate papers in a half-semester. She prefaced her remarks with the statement that she couldn't generalize as to why students turn in the same paper. She did put forth possible reasons as being: that for some students, dishonesty is a way of life, for others, pressure and self-preservation is the motivation, and still others simply do not understand misrepresentation. She elaborates that the students

who do not understand misrepresentation wouldn't cheat on a test, but somehow their logic allows that working together and turning in the same paper is acceptable. In handling misrepresentation, Instructor Two writes across the assignment "Please see me." The responses of the students directs her course of action. Only in exceptional cases, for example when one student isn't aware that another student has copied his/her work, does this instructor not require that both students do the assignment again. All students are given the Iowa State University Information Handbook and told to read the statement on academic dishonesty. Instructor Two feels that this practice makes a true impact.

Instructor Three receives zero to one set of duplicate papers in a half-semester. She explains misrepresentation occurring on the "Indexing Services Assignment" as: the student is not thinking, or the student does not understand the concept of independent scholarship and misrepresentation. Another possibility given is, the student may be lazy and copying is easy to do. And finally, Instructor Three puts forth that some students will exploit others.

All instructors have the students do the assignment again. Also, decisions on how to proceed are generally based upon the circumstances and the student's response. And the consensus is that most of the students who commit misrepresentation are not aware of the principles of independent scholarship and academic integrity.

The three instructors were asked if they perceived a responsibility to instill academic integrity in their students. Instructor Three stated yes. She announces to her classes that they shouldn't turn in the same paper and further explains that the purpose of this

assignment is to teach a skill students need to know; therefore, in order to learn the skill, students need to do their own work. Instructors One and Two believe that an entering freshmen should be aware of what is right and wrong, and especially in an academic setting. Therefore, these two instructors do not discuss academic integrity in the classroom.

Results: The Student Response

Twenty-five students volunteered from four sections of Library Instruction 160. Twenty-three dilemmas were returned and twenty-two students were available for interviews. Twelve females and eleven males returned the dilemma. Nineteen freshmen, three sophomores and one junior responded. The age range was 18-46 with five respondents being 25 years of age or older. An example of the dilemma which students responded to is provided in the Appendix.

Nine of the 23 students would turn in the same assignment, 14 would not. Conditions were placed on four of the yes responses and five of the no responses. The conditional response stated that only one assignment should be turned in but with both names given on the assignment. This shows at least an elementary understanding of co-authorship and independent scholarship.

Cognitive development theory and Lawrence Kohlberg's cognitive based theory of moral development may be used to illuminate understanding the logic students follow when they misrepresent their work. And by understanding their reasoning, perhaps faculty members will have additional information with which to implement instructional methods for instilling academic integrity.

Lawrence Kohlberg has delineated six stages of moral development.

These stages may be described as: Stage 1: Punishment-and-Obedience Orientation, this is where one is responsive to good/bad and right/wrong but only in terms of avoiding punishment or for gaining favors. This is a self-centered orientation which interprets behavior in relation to the physical or the hedonistic consequences of action. Stage 2: The Instrumental-Relativist Orientation describes an individual who views moral action as that which satisfies one's own needs and maybe the needs of others. There is some sense of fairness and reciprocity but it is materialistically motivated. Stage 3: The Interpersonal Concordance or "Good Boy - Nice Girl" Orientation is an orientation towards approval seeking. The right action is that action which pleases or helps others. Approval by other people is essential for the person in this stage. Stage 4: The "Law and Order" Orientation is one where an individual is responsive to fixed rules and regulation. A respect for authority is present and right behavior means doing one's duty. Stage 5: The Social Contract, Legalistic Orientation, Generally with Utilitarian Overtones is a stage of awareness that most values and rules are relative to a group. These relative rules should be upheld because they are the social contract of the group. Stage 6: The Universal-Ethical-Principle Orientation is a behavior pattern which follows self-chosen ethical principles. Right behavior is defined by the decision of conscience, or the principle to be followed. It is characterized by being abstract and ethical and appeals to logical comprehensiveness, universality, and consistency (Smith 1978, 55-56).

Nine respondents, giving either yes or no answers, placed conditions on turning in the assignment. This conditional answer illustrates a sketchy understanding of academic integrity and was

thirty-nine percent of the sample. The conditional yes most often stated that only one assignment should be turned in, but with both names given on the assignment. Also there is understanding of receiving half credit.

When asked why the answer "yes" is correct, respondents could not go beyond the idea of working together is acceptable. The logic followed is that joint efforts are admissible and that sharing answers is proper. And there is comprehension that working together equals co-authorship. Understanding the material is key for both the conditional yes or no answer and the absolute affirmative response. For these students, learning and understanding the material, that is, meeting their immediate needs for knowledge, is essential to the answer. The conditional answer is most representative of Stage 2. Here, one follows rules only when it meets individual needs. The assignment must be turned in, therefore, following Stage 2 reasoning, working together and handing in the same assignment is legitimate. This answer is rooted in Stage 2, but moving towards Stage 3; the idea of co-authorship, turning in one paper, and understanding that full credit can not be earned, shows movement towards establishing mutual relationships. Trust is intrinsic to this stage, and in order to earn the teacher's trust, the student would turn in one paper. In the words of one student yes "two papers would be dishonest. If I was a teacher and received exact copies I would be offended." Yet, this student would still work with another individual and turn in one assignment in order to fulfull the need of meeting a deadline. Other yes responses overlap Stages 3 and 4. These students answered that they had difficulty believing that the same answers would result. Not clear on the nature of independent scholarship,

these two respondents want policy from the instructor as to when they can work together and when they can not. Their understanding of academic integrity is at the point where exact copying is incomprehensible to them, yet they want rules that specifically forbid working together. Academic integrity is not an internal value, but rather an external value which needs to be delineated and policed by authorities.

For the affirmative answers, most believe they would have answered the dilemma the same way in the past as they have now. One conditional yes answer stated she would probably have turned in a copy of another's work in high school, another student felt her mood affected her answer. One student pointed out that he would not have answered differently in the past, but thinks his answer will change in the future because he is "learning the importance of individual work in college." His answer shows he is developmentally on the verge of understanding academic integrity. His articulate response is quoted in full:

> 'Yes, if both participated in discovering/producing the answers, there should be no problem in both people claiming the work. Unless it was specifically stated that all work was to be [done] independently.
>
> This reasoning applies only to classes of this nature though, that is, classes in which material is learned. In classes where creative thought is involved, i.e., English papers, creative writing, art, etc., then it would be wrong because two people cannot truly come up with (one) idea.'

The distinction for this student is in the type of assignment. Courses and assignments where the objective is to comprehend knowledge and demonstrate comprehension by recalling/representing information rather than synthesizing information is not worth the effort of independent work. For this student, an assignment that has proven right answers can be done with another student with one assignment turned in as two separate works because the outcome is not "creative."

Three respondents said they would turn in the same assignment and did not place any conditions on their answers. Similar to the conditional yes and conditional no, understanding the material is key to the logic. But the difference is the absolute correctness. For one student "It wouldn't be like we copied it from someone because we each did work on it. And besides, no one will ever know." The same principle stated another way illustrates the total disregard for doing one's own work "yes = if you both understand all the question material; and make sure to copy it on your own assignment paper." Understanding the material and not getting caught is the behavior pattern for these students. Representative of Stage 1, but moving towards Stage 2, these students view their immediate needs as important. When asked what they would do if they were a teacher faced with two exact papers, these students struggled with the concept. Role taking was difficult. These students could not go beyond "it is okay to work together" and couldn't imagine grading such papers, "I don't know" and "working together is okay" was the constant stammer, indicating an inability to understand viewpoints other than one's own. It is interesting to note that one absolute yes remarked that in the past he may have answered "no" to give the teacher the answer she wants, i.e., the expected "right" answer. But now he believes that working together is acceptable, there is nothing wrong with it and nothing wrong in turning in exact papers. This may be an example of regression from Stage 3, approval seeking to Stage 2, hedonism.

Five females said they would turn in the same assignment, four males agreed; this is 39% of the sample, and represents a sizeable minority.

Seven females and seven males answered they would not turn in the same assignment. Stages in moral development ranged from Stages 1 to 6. Three of the negative responses would not turn in the same assignment for fear of getting caught and receiving a failing grade. One respondent qualified his answer by stating "not if it is the same instructor." When interviewed and asked what if two different instructors were involved, the response came "well, I would chance it, and pray that the instructors didn't happen to talk and find out." Avoiding punishment is his motivation.

Some of the "no" answers were conditional like the "yes" answers and followed the logic of "working together is okay as long as you both understand the material." Again, comprehending material assigned is key, but the concept of the teacher being able to evaluate student comprehension is absent. Hovering between Stages 2 and 3, these students are motivated by what fulfulls their immediate needs but they experience conflict with the expectation of doing one's own work.

Stage 4 Law and Order or doing one's duty was best represented by the student who said she would not turn in the same assignment because that is not what her parents taught her. There was no personal comprehension and adherence to academic integrity, but rather an adherence to maintaining a code which authority had set forth.

The highest level of moral development, Stage 6 - Universal-Ethical Principles, where one follows a set of beliefs which are self-chosen and upheld because they are right, was expressed by four students. These students described turning in the same assignment as cheating. To turn in exact copies was wrong because the

student would deny himself/herself the benefit of learning what the teacher had to offer. Most importantly, copying was stated as something they could not do, because cheating is "morally wrong."

When did Stage 6 students take on this belief? Two males and one female felt that turning in the same assignment is something they would have done in junior high school. The remaining students don't believe they would have answered differently at any time.

Conclusions

Sixty-one percent of the students polled would not turn in the same assignment. But approximately 35% of this group is motivated by fear of punishment or have placed conditions on the response which indicates a sketchy comprehension of misrepresentation and academic dishonesty. Thirty-nine percent of the students showed being on the brink of understanding academic integrity but are stuck by being motivated by their own immediate needs and interests. Two of the 23 students answered they would turn in the exact assignments and did not indicate any conflict or struggle with what was being presented. Class standing rather than age was a determination in understanding academic integrity. Only two of the five students over 25 years old answered no and one was a sophomore. These data support student perceptions of academic dishonesty explored by Nuss (1984) and Barnett and Dalton (1981).

Elizabeth M. Nuss warns that today's students are more achievement oriented and value the ability to compete more than they value academic integrity. Also faculty members have allowed academic dishonesty to persist because of our reluctance or disinterest in communicating the worth of independent scholarship to our students (Nuss 1984, 140). Given the results of this study and the supporting

documentation of other studies, it is evident that faculty must participate actively in imparting the concept of academic integrity. We must be responsible and state clearly our expectations and teach the value of independent scholarship. We must clarify that group work means group recognition. Also, we need to make our assignments interesting and challenging (Singhal and Johnson 1983). As one student stated in support of Singhal and Johnson's recommendation, "I would risk cheating in an easy course because it isn't worth any of my time."

Faculty members must reinforce the understanding of academic integrity that 60% of our students understand, clarify the concept for 39% of our students, and attempt to teach the value of academic integrity to our remaining 1%. This is necessary because what our students don't know about academic integrity will hurt them.

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Appendix A

Thank you for participating in this study. Your anonymity will be honored.

My classification is:

[] Freshman [] Sophomore [] Junior [] Senior

I am:

[] Female [] Male

I am:_____ years old.

Directions: Please write a response to the situation given below. State the reasons for the action that you would take.

The Indexing Services Assignment is due tomorrow morning. You haven't done the preliminary exercises in The Library Instruction Manual which will help you understand how to proceed. You discover that your roommate shares the same dilemma. Both of you decide then to go to the library and work on it together. Your collaboration results in one piece of work. Should you both turn in the same assignment?

APPENDIX B

Questions for Library Instructors

How often do you receive the same paper from more than one student in a semester?

To what do you attribute this student practice?

How do you handle the infraction of students turning in the same paper?

Do you perceive a responsibility to instill academic integrity in your students?